8BIT Mart

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Harrowden, 39 High Street, Sutton-in-the-Isle, ELY, Cambs CB6 2RA

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EDITOR'S COLUMN - ISSUE 4

John Turner has dropped me a line to ask whether I could suggest a 'Best Buy' as part of the "I've got a ? now what can I do with it series?"

Well I *could*, and at the end of the series I *will*, do a comparison chart showing the various computers' features side by side, but part of the point of the series (and **8BIT Mart** magazine generally) is to show that each of the many 8-bit computers still available and in use is *particularly* good at some things and may be worth buying for not much more than a so-so program for the computer you already have, whatever that may be.

Actually, upon re-reading John's letter, I think he might mean 'the best within the range being discussed' in which case let's get up to date with the CPC range covered last month.

I suggest the dark-cased CPC6128 with the colour monitor option as the range's best buy for a beginner. It uses 3" discs as standard, but a cheap 3½" drive can be easily added and used as a first drive for most purposes, also a standard tape deck, ROM boxes, and almost anything except cartridges. They are readily available for less than £100.

In the mean time, I have done a piece on 'what to spend my Christmas present cash on.' This massive piece has been compiled in association with some of the specialists on the 'Big 5' 8-bits and suggests how to get the best from your existing machine *without* buying another one.

John was also one of the many who have got in touch regarding emulators for use on a Spectrum. If you are a member of a user group, or subscribe to a fan/magazine which serves users of a specific computer this is just the sort of enquiry they can probably help you with so drop them a line.

Mike Elliston of South Essex PCW group has asked that all advertisers in 8BIT Mart give a town or exchange as well as a phone number. Although I understand that this may discourage some potential responders to adverts from getting in touch with someone who is a long way away, I am inclined to think that premature disclosure is the best policy.

In future, if advertisers do not do it anyway, I will look up the code and put in the exchange name or nearest big town/city (whichever is clearer) after each dialling code unless advertisers specifically ask me not to do so. Incidentally, I am not so mean as to cut advertisements if this takes them over the fifty word allowance.

Sorry I have missed out Tom Dean's PD piece this time due to space limits, but he'll be back next issue, together with more Internet stuff, emulator information, and a truly TOP piece about where the BT 'Hacker' is now. Hint; if your insurance renewal arrives soon, check it ***very*** carefully.

Amstrad Action reckon we're worth 80%. Thanks, and that was issue 2.....

Thanks to an introduction through Joyce Cook of the Softsell Spectrum Club, we have a new contributor: the famous Dr Randle.

DR RANDLE'S SOFTSELL SURGERY

Hello and welcopme to the first article from the SOFTSELL Spectrum Club. I will be your host throughout the coming months. My name is Darren Randle alias The Doctor. If I can be of any help to my readers please don't hesitate to drop me a line. (if it's medical advice you want you should hesitate for a long time - J).

Over the coming issues we will be looking at software in the Club catalogue from days gone by. Commercial software is not easily obtainable these days and people are being forced to upgrade to machines with better support. This is what 8BIT MART, SOFTSELL and other user groups are here for, to keep you faithful to your machine. The SOFTSELL catalogue is one of the best Spectrum collections going and all titles are available for your enjoyment.

We'll start off this month by looking at one of my all time favourites on the Speccy, DEUS EX MACHINA. Firstly let me say this is NOT compatible with the +2A or +3. The original grey +2 handles it fine though. You will also need access to a hi-fi or tape player.

DEUS is probably the most adventurous game ever to grace the home computer. The plot is very strange and views the start of a new life inside the computer all the way through to old age. As you play the game an audio sound track accompanies play and takes you through the levels giving advice etc. The voices on the tape include Mel Croucher, Jon Pertwee and Frankie Howerd.

Game play is fairly simple and it takes a good hour or so to play from beginning to end. Taking into account that this is compatible with a 48K machine, the program stands the test of time very well. There is an excellent use of graphics, good animation and a truly original concept. There has never been another game like it.

The game has been compared to Pink Floyd's "The Wall" (buy it now it's an excellent album) and it follows the same sort of idea. If you want to wallow in a little nostalgia hire this one today. Well that's just about all the space I have in this issue. All that remains is for Joyce to add any relevant details to this article. See you next time.

DARREN

The Doc's contribution is most welcome, and I would like to take this opportunity to invite contributions from any groups or readers. Ideally, I would like to have a chat about it first so that we can agree the best way to get articles from you to me, and to try to avoid too much duplication of the subjects covered. As I was recently in this position as a contributor myself to another magazine I would like to save *you* wasting *your* time.

This is not a one-man-band, and I welcome involvement from others. As 8BIT grows, and I am pleased to say it continues to do so at a very acceptable rate, I will need all the help I can get!

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10-5 daily. Tel: 01225 775446

ALCHEMIST RESEARCH

In response to my piece last issue on emulators I have received a really ***ENORMOUS*** folder from Andy Davis at Alchemist Research. I do not have enough space to give adequate coverage to this in one issue, so I will spread the details over following issues of "8BIT".

Suffice to say at this point that he has a large numbers of emulators to persuade a PC that it's really one of most 8-bit computers (including the ability to run programs), there is a large Spectrum user group with a PD catalogue to make you drool, and details of the +D system to allow for information interchange between a Spectrum and a PC, a PCW, or a CPC. At last; I *thought* it could be done!

There's information on CP/M on the Spectrum and (as they say) lots, lots more. I am really looking forward to getting into this lot! If you can't wait, write to Andy at 62, Tithe Barn Lane, Woodhouse, SHEFFIELD S13 7LN

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FANCY LABELLER

This program allows you to design, edit, store and print text-based labels. The main features are:-
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* Matrix/Daisy/Star drivers on disc
* Variable line spacing <> labels.
* Locate labels by data search.
* Print multiple copies of labels.
* Build your own library of labels.
* Auto-numbering for ticketing etc.
* Fully menu-driven for easy use.
* Simple printer port selection.

PICTURE LABELLER

This is the program for those users wishing to add graphics to their label designs. The program is again menu-driven with the following main options:-
* Type text, in a variety of different styles and sizes.
* Select a graphic from the 100+ pictures in the disc library.
* More picture discs available.
* Load and Save Label designs.
* Print routine uses graphics + text modes for speed and quality
* Ideal for producing economy business cards/compliment slips, personalised greetings and club membership cards, home produce labels and many other designs.
* Not Suitable for PCW 9512/+ with Daisy Wheel printers only.

Labeller Uses

- Computer Disc Contents.
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Drafts. Lawyers often have to draft and re-draft documents a number of times before the finished document (the "engrossment") can be produced, making thorough checks of the legal position of each successive draft. Before wordprocessors, this was done by retyping the document a number of times over. Now... wordprocessors are ideally suited to the writing of longer documents (5 pages upwards). Drafts can be checked either on-screen or on paper. The document itself is recorded on disc so that each amendment can be incorporated without needing to re-type the unchanged parts of the text. When printing out a draft, it is usually quite acceptable to use draft quality print, and if you use a new or recently re-inked ribbon, the quality of type is very good. For fastest printing on an 8256/8512/9256/10, print in 12 pitch, draft. It is somewhat easier to proof-read drafts against engrossments if full justification to the right margin is NOT used. It also seems a good idea to append the date and time a draft was written (or an edition number).

M: Drive for Speed. You can speed up the time it takes to move the cursor through your document by copying it to the M: drive on the PCW before you edit it. However, you must remember to copy it back to a disc in the A: or B: drives as soon as you finish editing. M: drive is wiped clean when you reset the computer or switch off.

Spell-Checker. Initially, I was sceptical about spelling checkers, and would not use one on my PCW, having the opinion that reliance on it would lead to errors. However, I now feel that a spelling checker is very useful. Not only does it find mistakes which have been overlooked - it speeds typing speed. There is no need to correct minor mistakes as they are made, as the spelling checker will usually catch them and enable rectification. Legal terminology is no problem, as technical terms can be added to the dictionary.

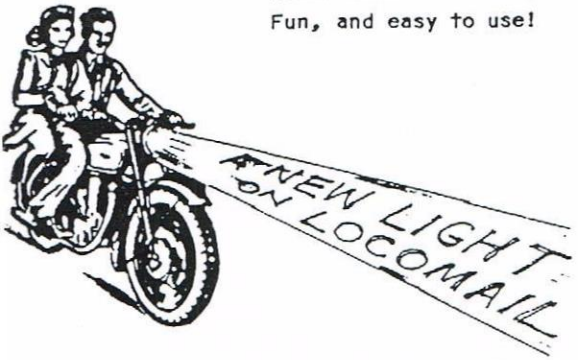
Engrossments. The appearance of the finished engrossment depends on three factors:- its print quality, its paper, and its binding. Even if you decide to choose draft print quality, the appearance is quite good if on a good paper (such as laid A4) so long as you use a good ribbon. Continuous paper (or a cut sheet feeder) enables the printer to print out without needing constant attention, but it should be watched in case the paper jams.

Very Long Documents. A faster and quieter printer needs to be considered if your workload is heavy (and there can be benefits using a hard disc drive, or Locoscript on the PC for speed). On a PCW, split long documents into two or more parts. Remember to number the pages (preferably in the footer zone): "Page (+PageNo)=== of (LPageNo)===" - the page numbers are needed for proof-reading, binding and photocopying purposes.

Club Enquiries to: Keith Simons, 10 Orrishmere Road, Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle, Cheshire. SK8 5HP.

P.S. PCW Tip for St. Valentine's day: To print a heart symbol (requires Locoscript 2/3 and a dot-matrix or bubblejet), press [ALT] [f7], then press the full stop key, then [ALT] [f1]. (This feature was actually included not for lovers, but for card players. For diamonds, spades and clubs, see your manual.) ♥ ♠ ♦ ♣ ♫ ♪

INSTANT RECALL - LocoMail as you've never seen it before. Fun, and easy to use!



INSTANT RECALL is a set of exceptional utilities for Amstrad PCW machines running LocoScript and LocoMail. It features a sophisticated Calculator, with a memory store/recall facility; Metric Converters; full-year Calendars, showing every UK bank holiday right through to the year 2000, plus a useful Accounts Package that keeps track of your bank balance. And all to a standard of screen presentation which you wouldn't normally associate with LocoMail.

The routines work with LocoScript/LocoMail versions 1, 2 & 3 - just state 3" or 3½" disc size and send a cheque for **£9.50** to:-

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J.M. SOFTWARE GAMES

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LIFE 1 50p (size 36k): "You place square blocks (called 'cells') on the playing area, and, according to certain rules, these cells reproduce or die according to how many neighbours they have. .... Particular patterns of cells have various unique behaviours, often seeming to take on a 'life' of their own. Just like the real universe, the Life universe has its own laws and properties, which have astonished computer buffs for generations. .... You're presented with a menu of interesting Life patterns, which you can place where you want to, ..." *July 1992 PCW Plus.*

LIFE2 £2.50 (size 26k) : Gun builder game, using a combination of chosen and random gliders, in as few time units as possible.

Gun shape

Glider - travelling North East, one square per 4 time units

Variable randomness (0-100%) to adjust playing difficulty.

Displaceable playing area: enables restriction of growth of an unwanted colony of cells by moving them to an edge or (better still) a corner.

"Unlike other versions of life where there hasn't been much to aim for, this Life has a purpose." *November 1993 PCW Plus.*

This review recommends playing MAIL232 LIFE before considering the purchase of LIFE2. If trying MAIL232 LIFE, note the following:

- If you normally define and use the function keys (f1, f2, etc.), these must be undefined;
- The message "Requires RS232C / Centronics Interface" may be ignored - it works without this;
- MAIL232 LIFE runs much more slowly than our programs, because of its larger playing area;
- The article on MAIL232 LIFE which accompanies the review shows a "simple glider". This is actually an 'r' - not a glider.

FOR THOSE WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY PLAYED LIFE, WE RECOMMEND, AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE ABOVE, OUR GAME LIFE1 (only 50p).

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Instruction leaflets to accompany all games are available free on request.

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Q. Are you hoarding software for the Amstrad PCW/PcW and which you no longer require?

Q. Are you looking to acquire a particular piece of software for your PCW?

Q. Does the cost of placing an advertisement in the national PCW magazines put you off?

If the answer to any of these questions is "Yes", then the PCW "Software-*Link*" database may be able to help you.

PCW "Software-*Link*" was conceived a year ago when it became clear that thousands of PCW users had odd pieces of software they no longer required, and many hundreds of users looking for a variety of software, especially those which are no longer in production. What was needed was a method of putting buyers and sellers touch with one another, hence PCW "Software-*Link*" was born, and has now assisted hundreds of PCW users.

Currently, there are some 250 individual pieces of PCW software registered on the database as being available for sale or exchange (including games, spreadsheets, word processing and utilities etc.), as in the region of 100 separate pieces of software sought by a number of users.

Access the database for sales or purchases, there is a one-off (minimal) fee for a three month period. To obtain full details of how the service operates, and how it may assist you, simply send a large sae to:

Database Manager, PCW "Software-*Link*", Dept 8, Portfield Close, BEXHILL-ON-SEA, East Sussex, TN40 2ER.

"Software-*Link*" is run as a service to PCW users on an entirely voluntary, non-profit-making basis.

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THE INTERNET AND THE 8-BITS

I have just bought a modem with software, cabling and connections to see whether 8-bit computers can benefit from some sort of Internet connection. So far, I believe that while E-mail and access to Bulletin Boards through a service such as Compuserve is possible and easy (both were actively advertised in the early days of the PCW and CPC magazines), logging on to the full Internet system is not because of the SLIP/PPP protocol, which requires a different memory configuration than an 8-bit computer can offer.

There have been doubts raised about the limited RAM, but this would not seem to be an insurmountable problem. My CPC has an expansion to bring it up to 384k, and PCWs can have a lot more that this with expansions and hard drives. So far, I have not come found any Spectrum, Coupé or Commodore C64 users who have added memory to over 500k, although I hear they could and that hard drives are available. I think the Sam Coupé could be the 'Dark Horse' of the 8-bit world - more powerful than any of the 'Big 4' and well-supported through user groups. The 'speed' objection would seem to be more a matter of on-line costs rather than whether the system would work. If anything pulled off a database of one sort or another can be dumped to disc as it comes in then, as long as disc swaps are requested as each one fills up, there shouldn't be any objection to large text files.

Picture files are trickier as each computer has its own preferred format(s), even if they can be persuaded to read most of the others' favourites! My son has just converted some PC graphics artwork to be acceptable to my CPC version of Microdesign, and it could also be converted easily to be read by the PCW version of Microdesign. This is being covered in **8BIT**. But doing an instant conversion as a .PCX file (or whatever) comes down the wire sounds much more difficult.

There are BBs for owners of all the 8-bit computers and CP/M users. For example, one I have just received details of is OMEGA BBS 0181 393 6226 (8pm-2am) who have given Softsell Software Hire (for the Spectrum & Sam) a page. Connection details are 8-N-1 to 14400bps. Thanks, Joyce.

I have just heard from Paul Westlake at PCW-PD who has sent the following (slightly edited) information:

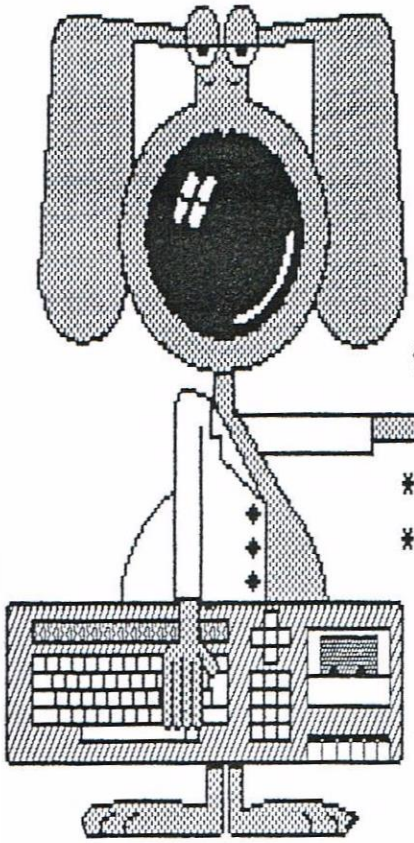
"Using ftpmail (file transfer protocol) on Internet you send a request to a ftpmail server as any access to a Bulletin Board Server and log off. This will find your email *worldwide* and puts it in your BBS postbox when done. It can take a couple of days due to demand. MKBBS updates 3 times a day. Newsgroups are stored and files tagged so you only get what you have not already seen.

MKBBS charges £15 per year + £1 per Mb Internet mail in/out with the first 2Mb free on membership. BBS mail is free. Paul Bartlett is the SYSOP (system operator) and is considering opening a CP/M forum if demand is sufficient. He already has PCW, CPC and Spectrum users.

116k of information takes about 20mins to come in. This costs about £1 so in this case a disc in a bag through the post would have been cheaper. Some conversion work needs to be done (off-line) to make the files readable by Locoscript. "

Paul Westlake will provide copies of fuller information upon receipt of a PCW 720k format disc and return post (you might try asking for a written version if you can't read a PCW disc.) His address is 27, Highley Close, Rifle Range Estate, KIDDERMINSTER, Worcs.DY11 7NZ and his phone number is 01908 225791. His Email number is paul.pcw.pd@mkbbs.co.uk, if you are already connected.

There is a lot more information in his letter and this will be the subject of a longer piece in the next issue. All contributions gratefully received.



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WoW SOFTWARE

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* * * *

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SIXTY-FOUR! is an exciting new fanzine dedicated to Commodore 64 computers. It contains all sorts of C64-related material and even comes with a cover disk from issue 3 containing exclusive demos of upcoming games. For more information write to SIXTY-FOUR! 5, Crane Avenue, Yaxley, PETERBOROUGH, Cambs PE7 3JH. REF:L

C64 games for sale from £1 including Codemasters titles and many more. Interested? Contact Denise, 48, Eastern Avenue, CHIPPENHAM, Wilts. SN15 3LW. Send SAE for lists REF:H

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WANTED: SOFTWARE for the Commodore C16 and Plus 4 computers. Also wanted Commodore 1581 disc drive. Anything considered, i.e tapes, disks, mags, books. Contact Peter with details on 01444 440647. Thank You. REF:D

* * * *

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WANTED - A copy of "Amstrad Bridge Player", published by CP Software (Leeds), at a reasonable price. A disc copy with instructions preferred. Send details to: Gordon Woolliscroft, 2, Wrenbeck Drive, OTLEY, West Yorkshire LS21 2BR or Tel: 01943 463718 REF: L

WANTED: Third drive switch and/or an ABBA switch for CPC6128. Derek Roberts, 22, Maes Gruffydd, Trefnant, DENBIGH, Clwyd LL16 4UL. REF:D

WANTED: Amstrad Action issues 2 and 109. £5 paid for each. Please phone Tyron on 01554 810521. Ref:E

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WANTED FOR A CPC: Multiface II and inside help on getting tapes on to disc. Also an unbugged version of Mindtrap and help with programs. Contact: Mrs. Christine Raisin, 117, Tilbury Rise, Cinderhill, NOTTINGHAM, NOTTS NG8 6DE. 0115 9765163. REF:E

'DISC BASE' with manual for Amstrad CPC. £6 incl p&p. RE Hobday 43, Cody Road, Clapham, BEDFORD, Beds MK41 6ED REF:F

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BOOKS WANTED: The Amstrad Disc Companion for the CPC 464, 664 and 6128 by Simon Williams. Published by Sigma press 1987. Also CP/M Plus Handbook: Operator's and Programmers's Guide For The Amstrad CPC 6128 and PCW 8256. Published by Digital Research Inc. 1987. Details to: John Walker 01752 706266. REF:F

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DMP2160 PRINTER HEAD WANTED. Would someone out there know where I would get a printer head for an Amstrad DMP2160 printer? Is there any supplier that still has them in stock? If there is, will you please let me know the suppliers' name and address. Mr John Jordan, 13, The Green, Lanesboro, Co Longford EIRE REF:G

WANTED: The "Admiral Graf Spee" and "Seduction" for the CPC. Also 32k Ram card for Star LC24-20 printer. Dave Caleno, 29, Chapter Road, Strood, ROCHESTER, Kent. ME2 3PX (01634 724262 8.30-10.30pm) REF:F

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SLEEPWALKER PDS-Something Good for your Amstrad! We supply quality public domain software on 3" discs for the Amstrad CPC range of computers. For a 6-page PD catalogue, including details of the best Amstrad fanzines, send a stamped and self-addressed envelope to: SLEEPWALKER PDS (8BM), 9, Meeting House Lane, Balsall Common, W Midlands CV7 7FX REF:F

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KING ARTHUR'S DOMAIN PD Library. Send SSAE and a disc to: K.A.D., *Brympton Cottage*, Brunswick Road, WORTHING, Sussex BN11 3NQ. No SSAE - no reply! REF:FDPP

SAM COUPÉ - WANTED

Can anyone help me obtain an instruction manual for a Sam Coupé? I have the machine but no manual. Please send details to: Mr RJ Reynolds, 42, Claremont Crescent, CRAYFORD, Kent. DA1 4RJ Ref:D

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BBC WANTED: "The L Game", a text adventure for the BBC series of computers. I Will pay £5. Rob Watson, "Harrowden", 39, High Street, Sutton, ELY, Cambs. CB6 2RA or any evening you can Telephone: 01353 777006 REF:L

* * * *

THE NOTICEBOARD

I hope you went after one of the cheap Spectrums being offered by OXFAM through the last issue of **8BIT Mart**. This very worthy organisation get a number of items of interest to 8-bit computer users handed in to their shops for resale.

What they have to offer tends to be pretty irresistable at the prices asked, especially when you consider they are all checked for electrical safety before resale. Whether you want a spare computer or want to have a go with a different one they should be worth a try. Collection needs to be arranged from the shop in ESHER, Surry, but if you will find this a problem, give me a call on 0353 777006 and I am sure we can work something out.

Brian Watson

THE INDEPENDENT 8-BIT ASSOCIATION (IEBA) This is an information service for Users and Groups. They issue a quarterly newsletter and have special offers for members. Membership costs just £1 for individuals, or £4 for businesses, user groups, or services. For more information write to either: Martin Scholes at 5, Beacon Flats, Wellington, TELFORD, Shropshire TF1 1RG or D Blackburn, 33, Dawley Bank, TELFORD, Shropshire TF4 2LQ. Enclose an SSAE for your reply.

CHIC COMPUTER CLUB is one of the longest established user groups covering 8-bit (and other) computers. Benefits include a network list of dealers (with offers for members), and a newsletter with a supplement for your computer's Special Interest Group. For full information and a copy of the CHIC newsletter please send a SSAE large enough to take an unfolded A5 sheet to CHIC, PO Box 121, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL8 9JP.

The UNITED AMSTRAD USER GROUP was founded in 1986 by a group of CPC-owning enthusiasts. The group is now well established with a friendly and mutually-supportive membership which extends throughout the world. They feel they have been so successful because they offer many of the same services as other computer owner clubs but for a considerably lower fee; just £8 for their UK members, £11 for Europe, and £15.25 for the rest of the world. This includes a year's subscription to the bi-monthly 'CPC USER', and access to about 6 megabytes of free PD software of all sorts, ranging from clever demos of the various CPC machines' capabilities to sophisticated business programs, passing through games, art programs, data bases, word processors, and programming languages on the way.

These are mainly on disc but some are on tape as well. If you send a disc or tape the only cost to members is the return postage. There is also a book library which operates on the same basis and a helpline network.

Membership also confers discounts through suppliers of software and other computer equipment. If you would like to receive full details send a SAE to: Tony Baker, UAUG, 26, Uplands Crescent, FAREHAM, Hants PO16 7SY. If you would like to receive a sample copy of the group's magazine 'CPC USER', please include either a cheque or postal order for £1.50 with your SAE. Tony Baker - Chairman UAUG

Sex and Pornography

When I mentioned to a couple of readers that I was looking for Valentine's Day ideas for the February/March issue, she suggested "sex, pornography and bad language in computing" as items which should be addressed at some time. While not quite what I had in mind, I thought it fair enough as an area for debate.

What I've seen of pornography and bad language in 8-bit computing, and that's quite a bit over the years, is very much in the 'schoolboy humour' grade of muckiness. The Demo programs which show off the sound and colour capabilities of the various 8-bits frequently, in fact *very* frequently, have scrolling messages including some fairly raw language, often directed at other machine coders. I note in passing that the speed some of these fly across the screen makes them quite hard to read sometimes, especially if they are in German, French, or Spanish. For goodness sake, if your going to do it, slow down a bit if you want to get your message read!

Going back through the old "glossies" researching this piece (honestly), I came across a PD library specialising in .CUT files of, shall we say, "an adult nature." I do not feel inclined to give details here, especially as they may not now be trading. It did seem a fairly limited area of interest.

What has stirred up the topic again recently in the media is the fact that the clarity of image capable from the big-brained computers with high resolution monitors, and even the incorporation of increasingly smooth animation, gets nearer to the photographic quality of magazines or films.

Images of people in various stages of undress have been available through many PD libraries for years. These were created using one sort of art package or another, or scanned in, and then edited to produce a screen file or clip art. With the technology available, the end results are still a good deal less than photographically realistic and are unlikely to inflame the passions or pass as "tending to deprave or corrupt", even in the terms of the sort of magazines on newsagents' top shelves. Generally, but not always, it is mildly deameaning to women and this is sad, but not untypical of the genre.

There is perhaps an argument that availabilty through the PD library sources bypasses the 'embarrassment-as-censorship' factor of buying pin-up magazines from newsagents but, as mentioned before, the images are of such inferior quality that I really don't feel they are worth making a fuss about except in one aspect.

That aspect is the element of secrecy. Apparently, quite a few Internet users often adopt cross-gender roles when using the electronic equivalent of chatlines. The motives for this are probably as many as the number of people involved, but in a recent radio programme several reported feeling "safer" on-line masquerading as the opposite sex. Especially weird to me was the fact that this was happening in both directions; men pretending to be women, and vice versa. I've played role-playing games face-to-face and by mail, but this seems to be a very particular twist on the notion of existence in a virtual reality.

To conclude, I feel that playing games is one thing, and as harmless as "make pretend" in the playground or dressing up in the local pantomime, but if someone feels they need to keep the ownership of this kind of stuff from one's nearest and dearest I would argue *that* is a much more unfortunate effect of the material on mutual trust and the nature of relationships.

I would be very pleased to hear other people's views on this subject. I realise it is a sensitive issue, so would be prepared to publish opinion without crediting the source if asked.

ART PROGRAM FILES FILE CONVERSION

Last issue I mentioned in passing that transferring files between the different versions of Micro-Design for the PCWs and CPCs was a piece of gateau and promised to say how this time.

PCW users have a much larger range of images available through the various suppliers, but they tend to be much more expensive than those which can be got from CPC sources. So each has advantages and disadvantages. In terms of quality I have found no real difference.

There are two stages of problem to be overcome: (1) the different disc formats and (2) the different file names. This is how it's done:

CPC to PCW: Since a PCW with a 3" drive can read CPC-format 3" discs directly this is the easiest conversion. Simply rename the MD file's suffix from .DR to .MDA. And that's it. If you've only got a PCW with a 3½" drive you will need to find someone with a 3" drive as well to act as middleman for the transfer. CPCs can format and read 3½" discs too, but I am advised these are less readable by PCWs. I am told the latest version of Microdesign can read these files too, although it produces .MDB files itself.

PCW to CPC: This is only slightly less easy. You will need DES by Campursoft, or another program through a PD library to enable you to read the PCW-format disc. Then it is just a case of renaming the file(s) suffix(es) from .MDA to .DR. If you are a registered owner of the CPC version of Microdesign, Campursoft will provide a free conversion program if you send them a disc and return postage in a jiffybag. If files are too big to import into any of the three page formats this conversion program will split it into manageable parts.

SD MICROSYSTEMS

(DEPT CPC), PO BOX 24,
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I'VE GOT A ?, NOW WHAT CAN I DO WITH IT? NUMBER 2 - Commodore C64

This is the second in the series on each of the 8-bit machines in turn, and is intended to be the kind of introduction to an unfamiliar computer that might be useful to someone who has just bought one second-hand and wants a brief summary of its best applications. I hope it may also encourage interest in a type of computer you do not currently have. I am obliged to Leon Bebbington for this article. His C64 magazine is available from Commodore Magic.

Hello folks! It's me; LS Bebbington (who? - rest of the world) I'm going to try and answer; "What is the C64 best at?" But first, "I've got a C64, now what can I do with it?" I am aiming this at people who are new to the C64, who may have had one from Santa, or something. So here goes.

There are several versions of the C64 which are; The C64 (looks like a Vic 20), C64C, C64SX, and C64GS. All these have a full 64k RAM system with 20k of ROM. Each computer is fully compatible (except the GS - this only takes C64 cartridges as it is a games system.) All these plug straight into any PAL television.

To help you know what connects to what, if you look at the back of your C64 (not GS) you will see the following, from left to right:

1) **Expansion port.** Plug-in game cartridges, memory expansions and a rarity known as the 3½" disk drive.
2) **Low-High.** A little switch which allows you to change the output to better suit your TV or monitor. If you have a perfect picture and sound this should not need changing, but you will need to use something small to switch it if necessary.
3) **RF out.** This connects your C64 to any PAL television.
4) **Video.** This allows you to plug in any Commodore monitor.
5) **Serial Port.** This allows you to plug in disk drives, printers, modems, etc.
6) **Cassette.** Home of the aging Datasette. You may also plug in a Data Drive here if you have one.
7) **User Port.** This was designed to be used for user-designed projects, such as controlling robots etc. But I haven't seen much for this at all.

If you turn the computer to the side so you are looking at the *f* keys (*f1, f2, f3* etc), you will see the power input, the power switch, and two joystick ports. Logically enough, these are 1 and 2 but, funnily enough, joystick 2 is usually used for player 1 and vice versa.

Now what is the C64 best at? Before I start this part of the article, may I point out that even *I* ask this question sometimes. When I see games such as Final Fight, Double Dragon and Street Fighter II. But whenever I load games such as Creatures, Lemmings, Buggy Boy, Wizball or Heavenbound etc I return to reality.

Hmm... It's hard to say exactly what the C64 is best at. I suppose the C64 is probably the 16-bit 8-bit when it comes to programming. Effects such as digitising, interlacing, FLI pictures, colour mixing, sampling, vector graphics, multiplexors, parallax and others have all been done on a C64, and very successfully at that. There are even programmers who have done a mixture of these effects (eg interlaced, digitised, graphics.) 4096 colours on screen with interlacing, rotating vector objects with sampled music, raster colour mixing with a multiplexor, overlaid sprites, and parallax scrolling etc.

.....This article will be completed in the April/May issue of "8BIT"

Leon Bebbington.

BEST BUYS WITH YOUR XMAS MONEY

It's almost traditional now, isn't it? What does Auntie give a computer-owning friend or relative when you don't know the first thing about computers? Answer - money: then he or she can make the choice of the most suitable software or gadget. So a little of the joy goes out of the process; a little of the anticipation of eagerly unwrapping the parcel. But nevertheless it is what Aunties do, so here you are, early February and **all this cash** still unspent because you just cannot make up your mind what will be the best way to spend it.

To help you make up your mind we present the **8BIT Mart Best Buys Guide** to suit **all** 8-bit computers and their users, regardless of pocket depth:

Section 1 - Games Players:

If you use a joypad rather than a joystick to punch, kick, jump and duck your way through games, then treat yourself to a mouse holder. This handy little gadget is like a flat box with an open top which sticks to the side of your monitor my means of the sticky fixer supplied. There is a slot cut in the mouse holders's outer wall and base which lets the lead trail out of the bottom.

The only snag is that most joypads I have been able to research for this piece are wider than most mouse holders. But don't give up yet. I used my trusty, and rather rusty, modelling saw to cut out a wide slot across the mouse holder to make the joypad fit. So now I don't have the joypad cluttering up the desk or falling on the floor when not it use. Cost: £1 each.

...And for joystick users? Buy an offcut rectangle of plastic-laminated chipboard a little deeper from front to back than your keyboard and about 30cms (12") wider. If you fix your keyboard to one end of it with blobs of Blu-Tack the suckers on the base of your joystick will provide a wobble-free waggle platform for your 'stick. Four small rubber feet, which can be bought from small and large hardware shops, will prevent scratching the surface under the board if you stick them at each corner. If the force of your waggling is more than the weight of your keyboard can resist use Blu-tack under the platform's rubber feet to prevent the whole thing sliding. Cost: £5

Regardless of what you use to interact with a game, there are still a huge range of very inexpensive game compilations available through mail-order companies at the moment. I have found these are usually very good value, and often my taste is not that of the reviewer who may have rubbished one or more of the games on initial release. And if they **were** right and I hate the game? At the prices charged nowadays a compilation has got to be a real stinker to be a **complete** waste of Auntie's cheque. But if it is, you can still transfer the good stuff off a tape in sections to minimise compilations' long loading times. And if you get a disc compilation you can always re-format the disc. I recently bought a four-game compilation on 3" disc for £1.99 and it was much too good to re-format. I also incidentally learned a bit of Spanish while playing the games... Cost: £2

Section 2 - Writers and other 'serious' users:

If you're still putting up with a dot-matrix printer and it's associated problems of fading ribbons and (according to model) dotty printout, especially in draught mode, treat yourself to a new inkjet printer. You will find there are some nitwits at the retail end of the computer business who will tell you that, apart from a PCW's built-in inkjet printer, 8-bit computers cannot drive them. This is nonsense.

continued.....

To keep things as simple as just plugging it in and setting a couple of switches, choose an inkjet printer which is described as 'Epson-compatible' in its manual or sales ticket description. You may have to ask the hapless assistant for this information as, in my experience, they rarely have it immediately to hand. If they appear to act dim, they are probably not acting, so ask to see the manual and look it up yourself in the index. If it says 'Epson-compatible' you should find it will work without modification with all your existing software. If it only works as an IBM Proprinter X24E (or similar) then you will probably need to modify some or all software - not a job for the technically naive.

The cheapest way to buy printers is second-hand, or new by mail order from one of the companies who advertise in the thick and glossy PC magazines. Slightly more expensive, but frequently more personable to deal with are the advertisers in the glossy 8-bit computer magazines and, of course, 8BIT Mart. The only things to beware of when buying new are the VAT and shipping costs which are probably charged as extras. Always check to be sure you know what your bill is going to be.

I have recently bought a Canon BJ200 from Simply Computers through an advertisement in Computer Shopper and found them a pleasure to deal with. There are companies who for a modest price will make you up a lead with a appropriate connector to suit any variations at the computer end. The connection at the printer end is now pretty standard, although some older machines may vary. Inkjet cartridges can be refilled very successfully (and therefore cheaply), and output is constantly good (even in draught mode) until they suddenly stop one day in the middle of a line. Always in the middle of a line... Cost: about £150-£200

If this is too much for Auntie's cheque to cover, my cheaper suggestion would be a copy shelf. In use, this puts a piece of work you need to refer to (a reference book perhaps or a set of program 'short cut' keystrokes etc) where it is most convenient for you. If you read the section above for games players, you will know than I am a great fan of offcuts of laminated chipboard. This is strong and cheap, is reasonably easy to work, and can have things fixed to it with permutations of glue, screws or Blu-Tack according to the amount or permanence required. With a little planning all the rough sawn edges can be out of sight at the end of the project.

I find that half way up the monitor on the right-hand side is the best place for my reference material, so I have made a raised platform sloping back at 45° with a 5cm (2") lip along the front edge to stop a book or sheet of paper slipping off. If a reference book is not spiral bound, a strip of the ubiquitous chipboard of the same width of the platform can be laid across the book to keep it open at the page you are using. If that's still not enough you can use big bulldog clips at the top to clamp the book open at your place. Cost: no more than £5 for the lot.

And for the really 'economically challenged' here is my paupers' choice. Put a box which is a little larger than your usual paper size a little nearer to you than the place you keep your paper supply. After a month of putting all your first draughts and printout errors into the box you will find that the sheer volume of accumulating paper which has only been used on one side will shame you into taking paper out of the box for these draughts and tryouts. This will be encouraged by the fact that you will recall I suggested that you site it nearer to your hand than your new paper. The only problem is now what to do with the small financial gift from Auntie. If it is so small, put it in the 'polos and coffee' fund. If you are a writer, this always needs support.

Section 3 - Everyone:

Best buy under £1: A thick, lined, side-punched A4 pad. This should be glued to

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your desk with Blu-Tack to resist the temptation to move it. A cheap ball-point pen should be tied to it through one of the side holes, again to prevent that well-known phenomenon 'equipment walk.' Believe me, you'll wonder how you managed without it.

Best buy under £5: A larger waste paper bin than the one you currently have. When it overflows, and it still will, at least you can plead that you are making an effort to keep the place tidier than the tip it frequently became throughout last year.

Best buy under £10: A large flat box for your tapes and/or discs to replace all the various mis-matched containers you have accumulated so far for the purpose. If this requires the purchase of two such containers to do the job, you are a hoarder and should put an advert in 8BIT **Mart** forthwith for all the surplus you could never live long enough to use.

Best buy under £20: This one is easy - membership of a user group for your computer for a year. For all the benefits of a club newsletter or magazine (probably), discounts (also probably), a PD library (perhaps), and especially a friendly, helpful voice on the end of a phone line when you hit a problem you can't solve alone you won't get better value anywhere. As a completely biased example; 12 issues of 8BIT **Mart** cost only £12.

Best buy under £30: A subscription to one of the news-stand magazines, if there is still one for your preferred computer. Though they are heavily criticised for one thing or another, they are still the best sources of national news and advertisements on the computers covered. Get them while you can. If you are already without a national news-stand magazine join **two** user groups, you need-all the support you can get.

And lastly, absolutely free: put some of the large 'coffee-table' books you received this year and last for Christmas under your computer monitor to raise it to your usual eye-level when sitting at the computer. In future you will be less-inclined to get neck and shoulder strain after prolonged periods working in front of the screen. And if you pile up more of these books *in front of* the screen you will reduce eye-strain too.

COMMODORE MAGIC

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'Sixty Four' reviewed by Chas Manning

The famous LS Bebbington (see the 'I've got a C64....' article elsewhere in this 8BIT Mart) has kindly sent Brian a copy of the second issue of his C64 magazine called, perfectly logically, 'Sixty Four'. Since he's up to his neck in other editorial chores, he's asked me to review it for the magazine.

It has 28 sides of A5 packed with news, reviews and all that sort of thing. Most encouraging is the news of several impending new releases for the C64, both in hardware and software. In the main, this appears to be past the 'only a rumour' stage and some of it is due for almost imminent release. The quality of both presentation and content of 'Sixty Four' means it is clear and informative. One measure I apply to a special interest magazine is if it informs me without assuming I have much prior knowledge, then it's probably doing its job. I even made sense of the technical stuff, and that's saying something from me, the last great technoramus. Hidden away on page 7 is news that they are planning to branch out into a multi-format magazine, so Brian had better watch his back (hey, remind me to edit this paragraph out - BW).

'Sixty Four' can be obtained from Martin Haywood, Commodore Magic, 5 Crane Avenue, Yaxley, PETERBOROUGH, Cambs PE7 3JH (01733 245554) and it costs £1 a copy. I am sure he would appreciate it if you also sent him a couple of stamps and a return address label to help offset his costs.

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THE BASIC IDEA - QUALITY BASIC TUTORIAL AIMED AT THE COMPETENT BASIC PROGRAMMER. CONSISTS OF A 42 PAGE MANUAL AND DISC OF EXAMPLE PROGRAMS. £14.99

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VERY ATTRACTIVE SHORTS

Though his advert tends to pop up in the PCW section of **8BIT Mart**, Dave The Disk Doctor can handle rescues of data from all sorts of discs for all varieties of computers. His service is all for charity so when your disc next goes sproiiong or more usually "Read Error.." do nothing more before you've given him a call. See his ad elswhere.

Wanted: Commodore 64 contacts in Cheshire please. Tape or Disk. Leon 01606 861647.

Wanted! Vic 20 Software/Hardware etc. Contact: Leon 348, Station Road, Winsford Cheshire CW7 3DG. Tel: 01606 861647.

SIXTY-FOUR! Fanzine. 100% C64. Issues 123 now available. Phone Martin Haywood between 6pm and 7pm 01733 (Peterborough) 245554

WANTED: Amstrad Actions: 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. Reasonable Price Paid. Thank you to all for your help and advice. Mrs C Raisin, 117 Tilbury Rise, Cinderhill, NOTTINGHAM NG8 6DE

As well as running the GD.PD CPC library, Dave Stitson also runs the local user group; CPC South West. You can contact him at 6, Connaught Ave, Mutley, PLYMOUTH, Devon PL4 7BX

I have been contacted by Jon Moss of JM Software for help. He is looking for someone to configure some or all of his programs which run under CP/M for other machines. Generally, these are to do with the display on other machines. If you can help please contact **8BIT Mart** in the first place as I have fuller details than I have space for here.

The Cornwall PCW Club have now adopted their constitution, discussed last issue, and elected a committee to formulate policy and oversee the running of the club. Contact secretary Kate Hadley on 01208 872720 for fuller details of coming events. A handbook is in preparation, and they had the good taste to reprint the piece on 3" discs from the last **8BIT Mart** in their newsletter.

This is the piece's *fifth* reprint elsewhere. Very flattering, or are they all as short of copy as me?

Incidentally, Mike's now got the books requested in this month's adverts so please don't offer him any more!

I have heard via James Waddington and Joyce Cook that Spellunker has now ceased trading.

Darren Blackburn of the IEBA reports there are emulators available to enable a SAM to read in Amiga and PC screen shots and text files.

The wonderful ZAT has now breathed its last but the new version, the SAM PRIME magazine, may be out by the time you read this. Contact: D Blackburn at 33, Dawley Bank, TELFORD, Salop TF4 2LQ for further details.

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I am careful to try to supply a value to any hunch, belief, opinion, rumour or fact. But clangers can still happen. So, "sorry, and please tell me so I can set the record straight."

1st review of "Locoscript User": Still a good read, Rex, and a brave move in a shifting market to change the name and image. I hope it goes well for *all* our sakes.